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Boyhood.

BY

WARREN HOLDEN



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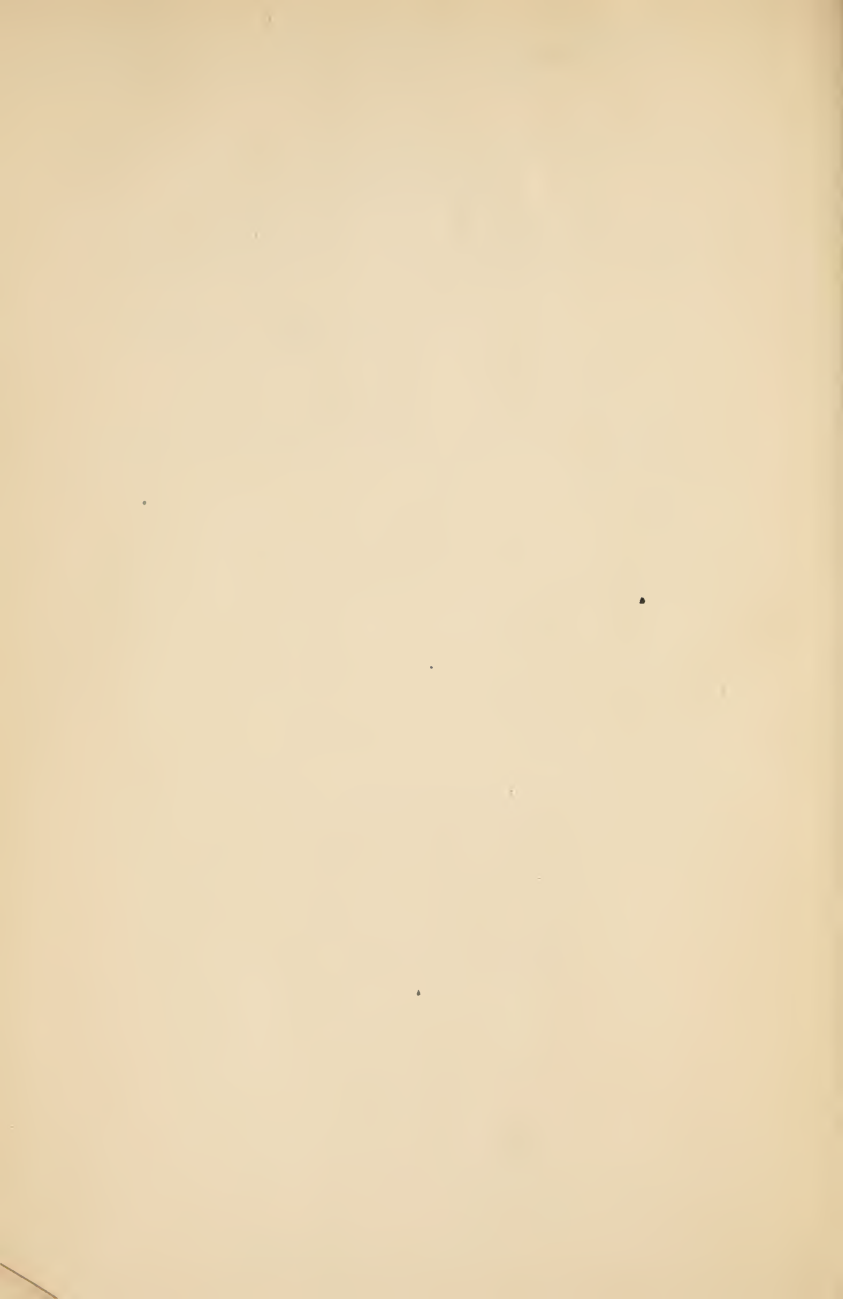
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BOYHOOD

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WARREN HOLDEN.

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TO THE
PUPILS OF THE FOURTH FORM
IN GIRARD COLLEGE

THE FOLLOWING VERSES ARE AFFECTIONATELY
DEDICATED

BY THEIR FRIEND

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE aim of this little book is to signalize every boyish act which is both natural and innocent.

W. H.



BOYHOOD.

Fit prompter thou of boyhood's mimic stage,
Fledgling of Poesy, turn o'er the page ;
Rehearse the various characters he played,
In full costume (though mostly feigned) arrayed.
Mechanic, merchant, farmer, shepherd, king,
Backwoodsman, hunter, bandit, everything ;
Wild Indian, soldier, sailor, foe, and friend,
Knight-errant, pilgrim, hermit, without end.
He lives through every phase of history,
From savage up to civilized degree.
In his development exemplifies
The whole creation microcosm-wise.

First he plays animal, lion or bear,
Companions simpler than himself to scare.
And next he personates the noble horse,
Surpassing the fleet Arab in his course.

An architect he builds a patchwork house,
Though cramped for quarters, snug as any mouse.

And if near by he chance to find a cave,
As primitive cave-dweller he'll behave.

A sanguinary warrior in the bud,
Though he may sicken at the sight of blood,
He thinks he'd be as prompt to wade through gore
As through the mud before the school-house door.
In Don-Quixotic arms from cap to boot,
He leads his comrades on to capture loot.
In spite of ignominious retreat,
Never acknowledges entire defeat.
Some qualifying circumstance appears,
To shield his pride and ward the victors' jeers.

A 'prentice shipwright, he constructs a raft.
Then, turning captain, mans his crazy craft.
A daring Crusoe, tempts the distant shores
Of mill-pond, and their mysteries explores.

He roams the wood, a hardy pioneer ;
Encounters dire privations and small cheer

Till supper-time, when he adjourns the play,
To be continued the next holiday.
Then wandering beyond the beaten track,
No house in sight, not sure of the way back,
Beginning to feel lost, he thinks he hears
An Indian warhoop: bravely curbs his fears,
Secretly hoping 'twas the distant scream
Of locomotive whistle: would not seem
A coward, though his hair stand up on end,
And his flesh creep. When lo! a well-known friend
Appears in sight, and quickly "Who's afraid?"
The little hero shifts his masquerade.

Fellows, come on, pretend there is a ghost,
And scare the girls out of their wits a'most.
Anticipating the clandestine joke,
The girls prepare a cunning counter-stroke.
The ghost turns out a treacherous boomerang;
And guilty shame o'erwhelms the conscious gang.

Of petty mischief or fantastic freak
The authorship is never far to seek.

We simply say, nor care to find more out,
That everlasting boy has been about.

An angler raw, the minnows of the brook
Enjoyed the feast provided by his hook.
Trying to catch a wriggling, struggling eel,
He caught a ducking: fate which made him feel
Chagrin and discontent but ill concealed—
If for his loss or gain was ne'er revealed.
But better luck attends his future sport,
Witnessed by many a catch of every sort.

Ready to reap where he has never sown,
Of course he claims all treasure-trove his own.
All things spontaneous are boyhood's right.
Each harvest brings a different delight.
The wild flowers strewn by fairy hand of Spring
O'er mead and vale, the earliest offering.
Wild fruits and berries, too unripe to eat,
'Though sour or bitter, all to him are sweet.

Apples and pears present a tempting prize,
And heaps of nuts enlarge his greedy eyes.
Mean rivalries contend, with blatant boast,
Who can secure and who devour the most.
Gaunt avarice betrays its ugly paw,
Grabbing and stuffing its insatiate maw.
Hide thy distorted face from boyhood's sight,
Or, with a Gorgon's gaze, give timely fright.
Beneath the spreading shade of sycamore
The button-balls their ample crop outpour.
Convenient for ambitious little folk
Catalpa-beans invite the manly smoke.
(The deadly cigarette had not come then
From the arch enemy of boys and men.)
To win the water-lily's showy flower,
Without wet feet, costs many a patient hour.
The oozy marsh along the river's side,
Where calamus and cat's-tail lift their pride,
Would seal his welcome with a miry pledge,
Confirming thus his freedom's privilege.
The shells and pebbles on the sandy shore



Add their rich treasures to his hoarded store.
On sudden pause, as one just wakened hears,
The hollow roar of Ocean strikes his ears.

Fire-plugs and hitching-posts are made to jump;
And when you fall, the curbstone for a bump.
Tall awning-posts are suitable to climb;
Thence to look down with patronage sublime.
Pavements are meant for hop-scotch, boys agree.
Kind hearts turn out and leave his boyship free.
And those smooth pavements patented of late
Are clearly meant for patent roller-skate.
But no self locomotion can keep pace
With the swift cycle rider's maddening chase.
Converting rights to his own proper use,
Ignoring claims which question the abuse,
The independent boy owns the whole world.
"Do as I please" his bold defiance hurled.

The neighboring rocks and hills precipitous,
Which oft he climbed with spirit venturous,

Were boyhood's Alps. While thus his limbs were
trained,
Perchance a loftier impetus was gained.

The sports successive, each in season, rule
The year ; save interruptions caused by school.
Glad boyhood's calendar appoints the days
For marbles, tops, and many other plays.
Some games come any time ; as swift foot-race,
And tag, and hide-and-seek, and prisoner's base,
Demanding nimble foot and eye alert,
And breath unbroken, capture to avert.
Base-ball and cricket and perhaps croquet.
Refined lawn-tennis waits a later day.
In good old days good pitchers pitched good balls,
But now live catapults hurl cannon-balls.
With due restraint foot-ball may hold its place,
But to curb roughness calls for manliest grace.
Wiry and lithe like limber acrobat,
With wrestling, vaulting, leap-frog, and all that,

He copies the professional athlete,
Aiming to be a circus-boy complete.
Manœuvres that his kite may highest soar.
When the string breaks, its wings can fly no more.
On rare occasions fancies fisticuffs,
But better instincts leave that game to roughs.
Boating and swimming youngsters only find
A pleasure, but accept the health combined.
And last the ice and snow bring bracing sports.
Roll the big balls and build the hostile forts.
Snow-balling, skating, coasting with the sled
(Tobogganning they call it now, 'tis said ;
Spoiling the game with their outlandish name.
"Sliding down hill," boys call it still the same).
Thus through the year pursues the winding track,
Prescribed by fate in boyhood's almanac.
As boys by nature are opposed to schools,
And men on principle averse to fools,
A doubtful conflict threatens to arise,
Requiring tact to fix a compromise.
Drastic persuasion, variously applied

As symptoms indicate, is sometimes tried.
Judicious coaxing, backed by seasoned birch,
Awakens zeal for diligent research ;
Which, step by step, in time removes each doubt,
Till learning's crooked paths are straightened out ;
When they become the ways of pleasantness,
And school-boy wins the guerdon of success.

Of friendship's guild frank boyhood is freeborn.
Nor fails the boy his birthright to adorn.
He keeps back nothing. All is common stock.
His trinket-box is guiltless of a lock.
Haply by pirate fingers quite bereft,
His quondam friend hath borrowed. 'Tis not theft.
His heart is all too big to let him mourn.
Only for wounded love is he forlorn.
The good *man* loves his neighbor *as* himself.
Enough for *him* beset by care and pelf.
The *boy*, dear unsophisticated elf,
Upborne between his twin angelic guides—
Companions never absent from his sides,

Who “always do behold the Father’s face,”
And draw their inspiration from His grace—
The guileless boy, like them, *prefers* his friend,
With lavish hand his little store doth spend
For *his* delight: nor calleth aught his own
Save that dear friend, zealous for him alone.



There was a boy on far Judea's hills
Who kept his father's sheep. His story fills
Full many a page of sacred history.
The first page solves his fortune's mystery.

Joy waits upon his steps from morn till eve;
And peace prepares the dreams his slumbers weave.

The sun arose to represent the throne
Of Deity in dazzling splendor shown.
He worshipped there with soul and body prone.

In milder beauty sank the evening sun,
Bedecked with robe of many colors spun.
Again he bowed and made his orison.

While on the blazoned shield that shelters night,
Whose stars betoken truth and honor bright,
He read his destiny in signs of light.

He knew no fear, because he knew no sin,
Content to let the Master rule within.

To meet a bear and lion in the way,
And with his hands alone the beast to slay,
For such a boy was merely rugged play.

To hurl a boastful giant headlong down,
And burst the bubble of his false renown,
Enough a shepherd's sling and polished stone,
By hand of innocence and trust if thrown.

No false pretence his honor could betray,
For he had learned to love and to obey.
Obedience was his proper name ; and love,—
Love and obedience, names revered above.

Thou happy shepherd boy ! Oh, hapless day,
When needful service called the boy away
And made of him a conqueror and king :
As if that office were the one grand thing.

Thrice happier the simple shepherd boy
Than all the kings in one ; with all their joy
Of gold and gauds and ceremonial rites,
And lawless power and sensuous delights,
That ever gratified the shallow heart
Of grown-up children. Must we ever part,
My David ? Oh, come back, boy of the soul,
And be the model of young self-control.

Know ye that wondrous boy of Holy Writ,
How 'mid the doctors he did meekly sit,
Hearing their grave discourse with eager ears,
And asking questions far beyond his years?
About his Father's business much concerned
Ere other boys the alphabet have learned
Of useful service. Happy Nazareth boys,
His playmates, sharing more than common joys.
Wistful and curious ye would search his face,
When some profounder feeling left its trace.
Honoring as father one of David's line,
Yet hearing whispers of a Sire Divine,—
Whispers prophetic of his dire crusade
Against the powers of darkness,—undismayed
He reached the stature of his heritage,
Ripe to begin his painful pilgrimage.
The Holy Spirit must unloose the tongue
That would dilate the story, which hath rung
Through heaven's high courts the countless choirs among,
A song of wonder more than half unsung.

O boyhood, golden age of mortal life,
Unmarred by manhood's fratricidal strife,
Ere disappointment's blight and cankering care
Have withered hope and left its branches bare,
Thou fond regret, art thou forever past?
And must the sad bereavement ever last?
Forbid it, Faith. The bright millennial morn
Shall clear the mist of selfhood's nightmare born,
The boundless hopes and loves of youth restore,
And I shall be a boy forevermore.





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